

## [Letter] Reply to article by John Duffy: 'What Sussex is gaining'

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Reply to article by John Duffy, Sussex University Registrar, 'What Sussex is Gaining' on outsourcing of university services. Times Higher Education, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/comment/247#comment-247>

As a longstanding member of academic staff at Sussex University I question that there's a 'friendly and tolerant atmosphere on campus'. The UCU union recently asked for a new and unusual statute on freedom of speech for all Sussex staff, precisely because some feel there hasn't been such an atmosphere. The statute was agreed and we were promised it would be held to. But it's been transgressed by staff being told they can't wear badges or use email signatures that support the anti-outsourcing campaign at Sussex. Staff fear loss of their jobs if they speak out against the university management. Protest has been met with heavy policing and an injunction requiring permission to protest, rather than dialogue. It's the anti-outsourcing campaign, and the occupation associated with it, that's made people feel more confident about speaking openly, in the face of a campus atmosphere that's otherwise felt the opposite of friendly and tolerant.

John Duffy says the 235 staff to be outsourced do 'such an important job for us'. Why, then, at a recorded meeting with students and staff from the 235, did he call their work (wrongly, in my view) 'sub-optimal'. And if they're of such value to the university management why do they intend to transfer these staff to external providers where under TUPE regulations they can be dismissed afterwards if an economic, technological or organisational reason is given. Or pay, conditions and pensions be diminished, as has happened at other places where such outsourcing has happened.

John says the 235 will get a 'fair and reasonable' deal on pensions if outsourced. But pensions at Sussex aren't protected by TUPE and the university management have openly said in talks they expect such pensions to be worse if staff are outsourced.

There's no evidence student protestors support violence. Those I've spoken to disavow violence and no person has been subject to attack during the anti-outsourcing campaign. Yet John links the campaign with violence.

John says better catering can be achieved with outsourcing. There's never been a consultation with unions, staff or students as to whether this objective could be achieved in-house. He's said, for example, that a reason for the outsourcing is so more vegetarian options can be provided. As a vegetarian, I'm mystified as to why private for-profit providers can do this but in-house staff can't. He says the plan is to reduce a £500k deficit, but this is disputed, including by the argument he's made that the outsourcing isn't a cost-saving exercise.

Demand for 24/7 support is given as a reason for outsourcing to private for-profit providers. But John has previously said how successful the in-house library has been at providing services 24/7.

John says peaceful demonstration is allowed on campus. But since the university management sought a court injunction protestors have to ask them for permission to hold a demo. I'm proud to say my students have continued to protest without 'permission' under such conditions. It's not at all clear that peaceful demonstration is allowed.

John says 'we are not going to retreat from the central idea that our services can be significantly improved through appointing external providers'. This is in tension with his statement that the university management have been 'engaged in discussion with the campus trade unions throughout'. Unions, staff and students say consultations haven't been meaningful because the decision to outsource has not been open for discussion.

Thank you to the protesters for opening up this question, which otherwise would have been closed down. They've been working in what John calls 'the best traditions of the university', not the plans for outsourcing that he gives this label to.

Luke Martell  
April 19<sup>th</sup> 2013